

RICCARDO BERTOLAZZI

THE DEPICTION OF LIVIA AND JULIA DOMNA BY CASSIUS DIO: SOME OBSERVATIONS¹

Summary: Among the ancient authors who narrated the reign of Augustus and Tiberius, Cassius Dio is surely the one who dedicated the most space to the influence that Livia Drusilla exercised over both her husband and her son. In this regard, the foremost example is found in a large section where Dio narrates how Livia persuaded Augustus to forgive Cornelius Cinna for having plotted against his regime. Also, according to Dio, after the death of Augustus, Livia considerably increased her authority over the imperial government, trying not only to co-rule with her son, but also to become the sole effective ruler by controlling all his political activities. Some scholars have suggested that Dio probably exaggerated the role played by Livia because of the similar extraordinary power enjoyed by his contemporaries Julia Domna and the other Syrian women who lived during the Severan age. A close examination of Dio's passages dedicated to Livia reveals no traces of situations that could refer to his contemporary political situation. The statements of the Bithynian historian and senator concerning Livia are normally well detailed because he made use of good sources. Indubitably, Livia's strong influence was fundamental in shaping the reign of both Augustus and Tiberius. Even two centuries later, while Severus was trying to depict his regime as a new golden era on the model of Augustus, Julia Domna followed the example of Livia on many occasions. Nevertheless, Dio does not seem to be aware of these analogies and his work appears to be characterized by a mere record of facts rather than an investigation of their real power within the imperial court.

Keywords: Cassius Dio, historiography, imperial women, Julia Domna, Livia Drusilla, political influence, Severan age

Among the literary authors who describe the events that occurred during the first decades of the Principate, Cassius Dio is probably the one who dedicates the most space to the influence that Augustus' wife Livia Drusilla exercised not only over him, but also on her son Tiberius. Dio's account often reports information not provided by other authors who narrate the same historical period, such as Tacitus and Suetonius. He recounts, for example, that Octavian granted Livia the privilege of being honored

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by statues, having free use of her private patrimony and enjoying the *sacrosanctitas* that was normally conferred on the tribunes of the plebs.² He relates the suspicions about her responsibility in the death of Augustus' nephew, Marcellus,³ and that the order to kill Agrippa Postumus after the death of Augustus was issued by her.⁴ The case of the conspiracy of Cn. Cornelius Cinna Magnus, which took place at some point during the reign of Augustus, is also interesting. Livia's decisive role in persuading her husband to forgive Cinna is recorded by both Dio⁵ and Seneca.⁶ However, differently from Seneca, Dio considerably increases Livia's participation. For the first time in his history, (Boudicca is the only other example of a considerable oration given by a woman) he attributes a long speech about the importance of clemency in the political struggle to her.⁷ Also, in the account of the reign of Tiberius, Dio reserves considerable space to write about the political influence exercised by Livia. He dedicates an entire passage to a description of how Livia considerably increased her authority over the imperial government after the death of Augustus, trying not only to co-rule with her son, but also to become the sole effective ruler by controlling all his political activities.⁸ In his work on Livia, Anthony Barrett hints at the possibility that Dio could have exaggerated the role played by her, owing to the similar extraordinary power enjoyed by Dio's contemporaries Julia Domna and the other Syrian imperial women.⁹ Some decades before, Albert Victor van Stekelenburg and Maria Antonietta Giua hypothesized a direct connection between the influence of Livia on Augustus' decision to pardon Cinna and Julia Domna's reproach of Caracalla for his excessive expenditures.¹⁰ In a recent article about the attitude of Dio towards powerful women, Eric Adler observes that a connection between the figures of Livia and Julia Domna in Dio's history is possible, but it remains difficult to prove.¹¹ Aside from this, the relationship between the portraits of these two imperial women is still lacking a deeper investigation. The matter certainly deserves further attention, especially with regard to the notable historical analogies between these two characters. Both of them, in fact,

² 49. 38. 1 and 55. 2. 5. On the topic cf. CENERINI, F.: *Dive e donne. Mogli, madri, figlie e sorelle degli imperatori romani da Augusto a Commodo*. Imola 2009, 20; GALIMBERTI, A.: Fazioni politiche e principesse imperiali (I–II sec. d.C.). In *«Partiti» e fazioni nell'esperienza politica romana*. Ed. G. ZECCHINI. Milano 2009, 95–127, here 122–123; HEMELRIJK, E. A.: Octavian and the Introduction of Public Statues for Women in Rome. *Athenaeum* 93.1 (2005) 309–317, with previous bibliography.

³ 53. 33. 4. On the topic cf. KUNST, C.: *Livia: Macht und Intrigen am Hof des Augustus*. Stuttgart 2008, 94–101; BARRETT, A. A.: *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome*. New Haven (Conn.) 2002, 35–36.

⁴ 57. 3. 6. On the topic cf. KUNST (n. 3) 189–190, 279; BARRETT, A. A.: Tacitus, Livia and the Evil Stepmother. *RhM* 144.2 (2001) 171–175; BARRETT: Livia (n. 3) 68–71 with previous bibliography.

⁵ Dio 55. 14–22.

⁶ *Clem.* 1. 9.

⁷ Dio's characterization of both Livia and Boudicca through their speeches has been recently investigated by ADLER, E.: Cassius Dio's Livia and the Conspiracy of Cinna Magnus. *GRBS* 51.1 (2011) 133–154.

⁸ 57. 12. 1–6.

⁹ BARRETT: Livia (n. 3) 155, 238.

¹⁰ GIUA, M. A.: Clemenza del sovrano e monarchia illuminata in Cassio Dione 55, 14–22. *Athenaeum* 59 (1981) 317–337, here 336; VAN STEKELENBURG, A. V.: *De Redevoeringen bij Cassius Dio*. Leiden 1971, 137.

¹¹ ADLER (n. 7) 151.

descended from distinguished families, that is to say the old senatorial class in the case of Livia and the provincial aristocracy in the case of Domna. Both of them gave birth to male successors and were awarded important honors and titles during their lifetimes. After the death of their husbands, the importance of their position was increased significantly due to their influence over their respective sons Tiberius and Caracalla. This paper primarily addresses this topic, which will be developed through the comparison between the most relevant information concerning Livia's influence and other similar situations described in Dio's vignettes dedicated to both Domna and the other Syrian *Augustae*. Subsequently, it will examine the imitation of Livia by Julia Domna. Other artistic and epigraphic sources attest to this phenomenon from the age of the Severans, thus demonstrating that at that time the model provided by Augustus' wife was still a source of inspiration for the establishment. Finally, I will draw some conclusions regarding Dio's historiographical methods and the attention that he reserves to the influence exercised by these imperial women.

With regard to the conspiracy of Cinna Magnus, it is easy to detect a recurrent topic of clemency in the work of Dio, who was a spectator of Septimius Severus' persecutions of political opponents after the civil wars of 193–197. As observed by Giua, in the arguments used by Livia to persuade Augustus to forgive Cinna it is possible to recognize a critique of Severus himself, who in a speech delivered to the senate and reported by Dio quoted the harshness of Augustus as the safest way to govern the state.¹² Other speeches by other characters in Dio's history develop the theme of clemency. The most evident cases are an oration of Julius Caesar to the senate in 46, where the dictator underlines the importance of clemency, while at the same time criticizing the cruelty of both Marius and Sulla,¹³ and Maecenas' speech on monarchy, where the advantages of a mild treatment toward conspirators are enumerated.¹⁴ Therefore, the cause of the expansion of Livia's role can be found in Dio's intention to use a character in order to express ideals that were particularly important to him.¹⁵ As discussed above, it has been suggested that the speech of Livia could be interpreted as an allusion to Julia Domna's rebuke to Caracalla.¹⁶ During his narration of Caracalla's reign, Dio reports that Domna complained about the excessive expenditures of her son, who in turn refused to pay attention to the good advice of his mother:

Καὶ ποτε τῆς Ἰουλίας ἐπιτιμησάσης αὐτῷ ὅτι πολλὰ ἐς αὐτοὺς ἀνῆλiske, καὶ εἰπούσης ὅτι 'οὐκέθ' ἡμῖν οὔτε δίκαιος οὔτ' ἄδικος πόρος ὑπολείπεται,' ἀπεκρίνατο, τὸ ξίφος δείξας, ὅτι 'θάρσει, μήτερ: ἕως γὰρ ἂν τοῦτ' ἔχωμεν, οὐδὲν ἡμᾶς ἐπιλείψει χρήματα'.¹⁷

¹² GIUA (n. 10) 335.

¹³ 43. 15. 2 – 16. 1.

¹⁴ 53. 31. 9–10.

¹⁵ SWAN, P. M.: *The Augustan Succession: an Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55–56 (9 BC–AD 14)*. Oxford – New York 2004, 148–149; GIUA (n. 10) 320–326; MANUWALD, B.: *Cassius Dio und Augustus; philologische Untersuchungen zu den Büchern 45–56 des dionischen Geschichtswerkes*. Wiesbaden 1978, 126–127; VAN STEKELENBURG (n. 10) 134.

¹⁶ Cf. n. 9.

¹⁷ Dio 78 (77). 10. 4.

Once when Julia blamed him for spending vast sums for them [i.e. the soldiers] and said: 'there is no longer any source of revenue, either just or unjust, left to us'. He replied showing his sword: 'Be cheerful, mother, for as long as we have this, we shall not run short of money'. (transl. by Earnest Cary¹⁸)

In my view, the fact that the topics of the two dialogues are so dissimilar makes their comparison difficult. The object of Domna's reprimand, in fact, is Caracalla's squandering of money, and not measures of clemency. The violent aversion of Dio towards both the behavior and the policies of Caracalla appears almost everywhere during his account of the reign of this emperor. The disagreements between him and his mother are also mentioned in another passage, which insists on the contrast between the foolish deeds of the emperor and the positive presence of the mother at his side:

Τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ἐμιαφόνει καὶ παρηνόμει καὶ τὰ χρήματα κατανήλισκεν. Οὐδὲ ἐπέθετο οὔτε περὶ τούτων οὔτε περὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῇ μητρὶ πολλὰ καὶ χρηστὰ παραινούσῃ.¹⁹

For the rest, he was staining himself with blood, doing lawless deeds, and squandering money. Neither in these matters nor in any others did he heed his mother, who gave him many and excellent recommendations.

This passage comes immediately after the account of Caracalla's debaucheries and irresponsible behavior during his stay in Nicomedia, where he wintered together with the imperial court in 214–215 after the Germanic campaigns. Once again, measures of clemency towards political opponents do not seem to be the object of Domna's reproaches. It is certainly possible that Domna suggested measures of clemency to Caracalla, especially with regard to many people who had been exiled by Severus. In another passage, Dio observes that after Severus's death Caracalla allowed many exiles to return from the islands where they had been relegated.²⁰ Nevertheless, with the usual polemical tone that characterizes the account of Caracalla's reign, Dio also notes that shortly afterward the islands were full of exiles again. It is however worth noting that either in the same period or a little before these events the senate had bestowed new honors on Domna, viz. the titles *mater Senatus*, *mater patriae*, *pia* and *felix*.²¹ Julie Langford observes that all these honors implied a new role for the *Augusta*, that is the supervision of her conflicting sons, the new emperors Caracalla and Geta.²² Her political influence was therefore notably increased, and it is possible that the measures in favor of the exiles were suggested or at least supported by Domna herself, who soon

¹⁸ Starting from this point on, I will utilize translations from the Loeb edition of Dio's history by Earnest Cary.

¹⁹ 78 (77). 18. 1

²⁰ 78 (77). 3. 3.

²¹ On the dating cf. LANGFORD, J.: *Maternal Megalomania: Julia Domna and the Imperial Politics of Motherhood*. Baltimore 2013, 134–136.

²² LANGFORD (n. 21) 84–112. Cf. also LEVICK, B.: *Julia Domna. Syrian Empress*. London, New York 2007, 93–94.

after also had to face the persecutions of Geta's supporters. At any rate, a connection between these facts and the contrasts between Domna and Caracalla reported by Dio remains hypothetical. The two passages mentioned above should instead be interpreted through Dio's strong hatred against Caracalla. Domna's figure is seen as the only element of supervision and moderation for the irresponsible policies pursued by the emperor.²³ This role is probably consistent with the expectations of many of the senators, who, as Dio observes using the first person plural, were often treated with disrespect and, most of all, forced to pay enormous sums of money to support the extravagant policies of Caracalla.²⁴ The same situation can be observed in the case of Julia Maesa and Elagabalus. According to Dio, when the emperor declared his intention to appoint his lover Hierocles as Caesar, a charioteer detested by both soldiers and senators, Elagabalus encountered fierce opposition from Maesa.²⁵ Furthermore, the fact that at that time the *Augustae* were seen as the emperor's supervisors, is testified to by Dio himself. Without adding any critical notes, he reports that both Maesa and Julia Soaemias accompanied Elagabalus to the Senate when the adoption of Severus Alexander was made official.²⁶ In summary, the episodes of Livia and Augustus and that of Caracalla and Julia Domna are based on two different situations. Dio uses the character of Livia in order to insert in his history a speech in favor of measures of clemency towards political opponents. The background, as suggested by Severus' quotation of the harshness of Augustus during his speech to the senate, are the persecutions against those who had supported either Pescennius Niger or Clodius Albinus during the civil wars of 193–197. In the case of Domna, the figure of the *Augusta* is depicted as the moderator of the anti-senatorial policies of Caracalla, with particular regard to the high sums of money that he forced them to pay. This role probably coincides with the expectations of many other senators. Mild treatment of opponents belonging to other political factions does not appear to be the main issue. Thus, in the dialogue between Augustus and Livia, Dio does not seem to recall a situation which occurred at the time of Domna and Caracalla.

The passage (57. 12. 2–6) where Dio describes the complicated relationship between Livia and Tiberius after the latter had become emperor offers other opportunities for reflection:

[2] Πάνυ γὰρ μέγα καὶ ὑπὲρ πάσας τὰς πρόσθεν γυναῖκας ὄγκωτο, ὥστε καὶ τὴν βουλὴν καὶ τοῦ δήμου τοὺς ἐθέλοντας οἴκαδε ἀσπασομένους αἰεὶ

²³ On the topic cf. MALLAN, C. T.: Cassius Dio on Julia Domna: A Study of the Political and Ethical Functions of Biographical Representation in Dio's Roman History. *Mnemosyne* 66 (2013) 743–751.

²⁴ 78 (77). 9. 6–7; 78 (77). 10. 1; 78 (77). 18. 3. As suggested by C. DAVENPORT (Cassius Dio and Caracalla. *CQ* 62.2 [2012] 796–815), it is plausible that Dio's point of view is representative of those among the senators who did not obtain either career advancements or benefits through the favor of Caracalla. Similar conclusions are expressed by LETTA, C.: La composizione dell'opera di Cassio Dione. *Cronologia e sfondo storico-politico*. In *Ricerche di storiografia antica I. Ricerche di storiografia greca di età romana*. Pisa 1979, 117–189, here 124–128. The scholar also observes that Dio's presence at Nicomedia while the imperial court was wintering there can be explained with the expensive liturgies to which, in such cases, provincial aristocracies were subjected.

²⁵ 80 (79). 15. 4.

²⁶ 80 (79). 17. 2.

ποτε ἐσδέχεσθαι, καὶ τοῦτο καὶ ἐς τὰ δημόσια ὑπομνήματα ἐσγράφεσθαι. Αἶ τε ἐπιστολαὶ αἱ τοῦ Τιβερίου καὶ τὸ ἐκείνης ὄνομα χρόνον τινὰ ἔσχον, καὶ ἐγράφετο ἀμφοῖν ὁμοίως. [3] Πλὴν τε ὅτι οὔτε ἐς τὸ συνέδριον οὔτε ἐς τὰ στρατόπεδα οὔτε ἐς τὰς ἐκκλησίας ἐτόλμησέ ποτε ἐσελθεῖν, τά γε ἄλλα πάντα ὥς καὶ αὐταρχοῦσα διοικεῖν ἐπεχείρει. Ἐπὶ τε γὰρ τοῦ Αὐγούστου μέγιστον ἡδυνήθη καὶ τὸν Τιβέριον αὐτὴ αὐτοκράτορα πεποικέναι ἔλεγε, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐχ ὅσον ἐξ ἴσου οἱ ἄρχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρεσβεῦειν αὐτοῦ ἤθελεν. [4] Ὅθεν ἄλλα τε ἔξω τοῦ νενομισμένου ἐσεφέρετο, καὶ πολλοὶ μὲν μητέρα αὐτὴν τῆς πατρίδος πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ γονέα προσαγορεῦεσθαι γνώμην ἔδωκαν. Ἄλλοι καὶ τὸν Τιβέριον ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἐπικαλεῖσθαι ἐσηγῆσαντο, ὅπως ὥσπερ οἱ Ἕλληνες πατρόθεν, οὕτω καὶ ἐκεῖνος μητρόθεν ὀνομάζῃται. [5] Ἀγανακτῶν οὖν ἐπὶ τοῦτοις οὔτε τὰ ψηφίζόμενα αὐτῇ πλὴν ἐλαχίστων ἐπεκύρου, οὐτ' ἄλλο τι ὑπέρογκον ποιεῖν ἐπέτρεπεν. Εἰκόνα γοῦν ποτε αὐτῆς οἴκοι τῷ Αὐγούστῳ ὀσιώσας, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τὴν βουλὴν καὶ τοὺς ἱππέας μετὰ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐστιᾶσαι ἐθέλησάσης, οὐτ' ἄλλως συνεχώρησέν οἱ τοῦτο πρᾶξιαι πρὶν τὴν γερούσιαν ψηφίσασθαι, οὔτε τότε τοὺς ἄνδρας δειπνίσαι, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς μὲν τοῦτοις ἐκείνη δὲ ταῖς γυναιξὶν εἰστίασε. [6] Καὶ τέλος τῶν μὲν δημοσίων παντάπασιν αὐτὴν ἀπήλλαξε, τὰ δ' οἴκοι διοικεῖν οἱ ἐφείς, εἴθ' ὥς καὶ ἐν τοῦτοις ἐπαχθῆς ἦν, ἀποδημίας τε ἐστέλλετο καὶ πάντα τρόπον αὐτὴν ἐξίστατο, ὥστε καὶ ἐς τὴν Καπρίαν δι' ἐκείνην οὐχ ἥκιστα μεταστῆναι. Ταῦτα μὲν περὶ τῆς Λιουίας παραδέδοται.

[2] She occupied a very exalted position, far above all women of former days, so that she could at any time receive the senate and such of the people as wished to greet her in her house; and this fact was entered in the public records. The letters of Tiberius bore for a time her name, also, and communications were addressed to both alike. [3] Except that she never ventured to enter the senate-chamber or the camps or the public assemblies, she undertook to manage everything as if she were sole ruler. For in the time of Augustus she had possessed the greatest influence and she always declared that it was she who had made Tiberius emperor; consequently she was not satisfied to rule on equal terms with him, but wished to take precedence over him. [4] As a result, various extraordinary measures were proposed, many persons expressing the opinion that she should be called Mother of her Country, and many that she should be called Parent. Still others proposed that Tiberius should be named after her, so that, just as the Greeks were called by their father's name, he should be called by that of his mother. [5] All this vexed him, and he would neither sanction the honors voted her, with a very few exceptions, nor otherwise allow her any extravagance of conduct. For instance, she had once dedicated in her house an image to Augustus, and in honor of the event wished to give a banquet to the senate and the knights together with their wives, but he would not permit her to carry out any part of this program until the senate had so voted, and not even then to receive the men at dinner; instead,

he entertained the men and she the women. [6] Finally, he removed her entirely from public affairs, but allowed her to direct matters at home; then, as she was troublesome even in that capacity, he proceeded to absent himself from the city and to avoid her in every way possible; indeed, it was chiefly on her account that he removed to *Capreae*. Such are the reports that have been handed down about Livia.

Much of the information reported here shows similarities not only with other passages from Dio's account of the reign of both Severus and Caracalla, but also with events reported by other sources concerning the same period. The following section will therefore be dedicated to the comparison between the facts narrated in the above-mentioned passage and the evidence from the Severan age. The facts that will be taken into consideration are: a) the public receptions of Livia and Domna; b) the letters written to emperors which include the names of the *Augustae*; c) the presence of the *Augustae* in public places (either the senate or military camps) and their desire to become the sole ruler of the empire; d) the question of motherhood, i.e. the attribution of the titles μήτηρ τῆς πατρίδος, γονεύς, and the proposal to include the maternal filiation in the name of the emperor; and e), banquets organized by the *Augustae* for senators and other distinguished personalities.

a) Public receptions (57. 12. 2)

Immediately after the observation that Livia enjoyed a position that was by far superior to those held by all the other women from the past, Dio reports that at any time she could receive in her house both senators and other people who wanted to greet her (τοὺς ἐθέλοντας οἴκαδε ἀσπασομένους). This passage closely resembles some critical remarks that Dio applies to both Agrippina the Younger (i) and Domna (ii):

i) Ὅτι τῆς Ἀγριππίνης οὐδεὶς τὸ παράπαν ἤπτετο, ἀλλὰ τά τε ἄλλα καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτὸν τὸν Κλαύδιον ἐδύνατο, καὶ ἐν κοινῷ τοὺς βουλομένους ἡσπάζετο: καὶ τοῦτο καὶ ἐς τὰ ὑπομνήματα ἐσεγράφετο.²⁷

No one attempted in any way to check Agrippina; indeed, she had more power than Claudius himself and used to greet in public all who desired it, a fact that was entered in the records.

ii) Τί γὰρ δεῖ λέγειν ὅτι καὶ ἡσπάζετο δημοσίᾳ πάντας τοὺς πρώτους καθάπερ καὶ ἐκεῖνος;²⁸

Need I add that she had public receptions for all the most prominent men, precisely as did the emperor [i.e. Caracalla]?

²⁷ 61 (60). 33. 1.

²⁸ 78 (77). 18. 3.

These two passages use the verb ἀσπάζομαι ('to greet', 'to welcome') in common with the passage about Livia. Although its meaning could be applied to different situations, as both a simple salutation and a reception, the importance that Dio gives to this ceremony appears to denote that this action indicated a high degree of influence and prestige. In the case of Agrippina in particular, it comes immediately after the information that her power was superior even to Claudius'. Although Dio could personally observe these privileges (either directly or through accounts of his colleagues) at the time of Julia Domna, it is improbable he would have attributed the same to Livia and Agrippina.²⁹

In the passages concerning the first two imperial women, he specifies public records (τὰ ὑπομνήματα) as his source, though it is not clear if he read these himself or through another account.³⁰ Moreover, Livia received the people who wanted to greet her at her house, while Agrippina and Domna did so in public places (ἐν κοινῷ and δημοσίᾳ, respectively). Finally, Livia and Agrippina met those who expressed the desire to greet them (τοὺς ἐθέλοντας and τοὺς βουλομένους, respectively), while Domna met with the most prominent men (πάντας τοὺς πρώτους), in the same way as the emperor did (καθάπερ καὶ ἐκεῖνος). It is also interesting that ἀσπάζομαι is used by Dio several other times during his account of the Severan dynasty. One instance is particularly interesting for the present discussion. During his stay in Nicomedia with the imperial court, Dio relates that Caracalla would call the senators to a meeting soon after dawn, but then he would keep them waiting in the antechamber until noon or later. In many cases at a late hour he decided not to show up at all, without even exchanging greetings with them (ὅπῃ γάρ ποτε ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ μηκέτι μηδ' ἀσπάζεσθαι ἡμᾶς ὡς πλήθει).³¹ In the court's etiquette, therefore, ἀσπάζομαι seems to refer to a simple exchange of greetings rather than a proper reception. Nonetheless, it is often employed by Dio to describe an official situation with an exchange of homages between distinguished personalities and either emperors or individuals who enjoyed great power and prestige at court. While narrating the indecent customs of Elagabalus, for example, Dio states that the emperor used to recline during the salutations of the senators (πολλάκις καὶ κατακείμενος τοὺς βουλευτὰς ἡσπάζετο).³² He also used to dance when performing sacrifices, receiving salutations or delivering a speech (τά τε γὰρ ἄλλα καὶ ὠρχεῖτο [...] καὶ θύων ἀσπαζόμενός τε καὶ δημηγορῶν).³³ At the apex of his power, Plautianus used to allow certain senators to be received before others who were there to pay their respects (πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν ἀσπαζομένων).³⁴ It is also interesting to note that the same ceremony is likely attested by the funerary inscription of the senator L. Plotius Sabinus. After the offices held during the *cursus honorum*,

²⁹ F. R. D. GOODYEAR (*The Annals of Tacitus*. Vol. I. Cambridge 1972, 190) suggests that Dio might have derived the figure of Livia as a power-hungry woman from Agrippina the Younger.

³⁰ Dio's consultation of archive sources has been denied by MILLAR, F.: *A Study of Cassius Dio*. Oxford 1964, 37–38; *contra* LETTA (n. 24) 139–148.

³¹ 78 (77). 17. 3.

³² 80 (79). 14. 4.

³³ 80 (79). 14. 3.

³⁴ 77 (76). 5. 3.

the text mentions the right of the *salutatio* in the second group of those who were admitted to Antoninus Pius' presence.³⁵ These kinds of receptions probably appeared very unusual if imperial women were involved, both at the time of Livia, Agrippina the Younger and Domna. This explains why Dio reports these circumstances as an extraordinary fact. In the case of Livia, he observes that she occupied a position that was superior to those enjoyed by other women from the past. In the case of Domna, when reporting Caracalla's decision to appoint her to take care of his correspondence, including also her name together with his own and that of the legions in the letters to the senate, Dio does so with bitterness.³⁶

b) Correspondence with the name of the Augusta (57. 12. 2)

Dio's report about the letters of Tiberius (αἱ τε ἐπιστολαὶ αἱ τοῦ Τιβερίου καὶ τὸ ἐκεῖνης ὄνομα χρόνον τινὰ ἔσχον, καὶ ἐγράφετο ἄμφοιν ὁμοίως) displays some similarities with 78 (77). 18. 2:

Καίτοι καὶ τὴν τῶν βιβλίων τῶν τε ἐπιστολῶν ἐκατέρων, πλὴν τῶν πάνυ ἀναγκαίων, διοίκησιν αὐτῇ ἐπιτρέψας, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς ἐν ταῖς πρὸς τὴν βουλὴν ἐπιστολαῖς ὁμοίως τῷ τε ἰδίῳ καὶ τῷ τῶν στρατευμάτων, ὅτι σώζεται, μετ' ἐπαίνων πολλῶν ἐγγράφων.

And yet he had appointed her to receive petitions and to take care of his correspondence in both languages, except in very important cases, and used to include her name, in terms of high praise, together with his own and that of the legions, in his letters to the senate, stating that she was well.

However, a careful comparison between the information related by each passage seems to show considerable differences. The most important one, in my opinion, is the appointment of Domna to an official responsibility, that is, the supervision of the correspondence of the emperor. Such a task is not so far documented for any other imperial woman. The information about Livia says that only for a certain period (χρόνον τινὰ), her name was included in the letters issued by Tiberius (αἱ τε ἐπιστολαὶ αἱ τοῦ Τιβερίου). Furthermore, the expression ἐγράφετο ἄμφοιν ὁμοίως, which comes immediately after, should be interpreted in correlation with the previous sentence. This means, in my view, that all the letters addressed to Tiberius included the name of Livia along with that of the emperor, but notwithstanding this, Tiberius should have remained the final recipient. It is difficult to prove either that they were sent to both of them or that Livia exercised any form of control over Tiberius' correspondence as Domna did with that of Caracalla. At any rate, this custom did not last for long. It was soon abolished by Tiberius, as reported by Dio himself at the end of the paragraph,

³⁵ CIL VI 31746 = 41111.

³⁶ On this topic cf. *infra*.

where he narrates that the emperor removed Livia entirely from public affairs, allowing her to take care of household matters only (sentence 6). The name of Domna, on the other hand, was regularly included in Caracalla's letters to the senate, where he stated that she was well (ὅτι σώζεται), an expression that normally characterizes only the emperor and the army. In addition to this, the role played by Domna is certainly more active and influential, since she supervised not only the correspondence (ἐπιστολαί), but also the petitions (βιβλία) addressed to the emperor. An interesting example of this activity is represented by an inscription that preserves her reply to a petition by the citizens of Ephesus concerning the bestowal of a third *neokoria*.³⁷ The structure of the text is very intriguing. The beginning contains a message to the inhabitants of the city by the *Augusta*, who expresses her desire that all cities and all populations could receive benefits from her son. The second part, which opens with the name of Caracalla, reports the decision of the emperor who bestows the requested privilege. The name of Domna is reported in the letterhead – much ahead that of the emperor – along with her greeting to the inhabitants. This suggests that the citizens of Ephesus sent their petition directly to her, who in turn brought the whole business to the attention of the emperor. Thus, the influence that she exercised appears to be far superior to Livia's. Domna could actually decide whether a matter was worthy of attention or not, with an exception for only the most important cases (πλὴν τῶν πάνυ ἀναγκαίων). However, towards the end of the reign of her son her control over both letters and petitions might have become total. According to Dio, in fact, at the time of Caracalla's campaign against the Parthians all the correspondence directed to the emperor was sent first to Domna – who at the time was staying in Antioch – in order not to bother the emperor while he was in the enemy's country.³⁸ In this context, the prefect of the city, Flavius Maternianus, sent a letter to Caracalla reporting rumors about a plot to overthrow him and to establish Macrinus as emperor, but the diversion of the message to Antioch allowed the conspirators to carry out their conspiracy before Caracalla could be informed.³⁹ In short, in Dio's account Livia and Domna represent two different cases. Livia had her name included in the imperial letters for a certain period (χρόνον τινά), a chronological clarification that cannot be found in the case of Domna. The name of the latter, included in the letters along with that of the legions and that of the emperor, would have remained in the correspondence (which she was supervising) until the end. In the case of Livia, management of the imperial correspondence would likely have remained in the hands of Tiberius. Domna, on the contrary, had control of both imperial letters and petitions at the time of Caracalla's travels in Asia Minor (215–217). It is not impossible that the *Augusta* had already held this task at the time of the campaigns in Germany (213–215). It is therefore difficult to interpret the inclusion of Livia's name in the letters of Tiberius as a reflection of facts that Dio could observe at his time.

³⁷ *IEph* 212 = *AE* 1966, 430. On the topic cf. BURRELL, B.: «*Neokoroi*»: *Greek Cities and Roman Emperors*. Leiden 2004, 70–74 with further bibliography.

³⁸ 79 (78). 4. 3.

³⁹ 79 (78). 4. 2.

c) *Presence in the public places and the desire to become the sole ruler* (57. 12. 3)

At the beginning of this section Dio relates that Livia attempted to manage all the public affairs as if she were the ruler (τά γε ἄλλα πάντα ὡς καὶ αὐταρχοῦσα διοικεῖν ἐπεχειρεῖ), though she never dared to enter the senate chamber, the public assemblies or the camps (πλὴν τε ὅτι οὔτε ἐς τὸ συνέδριον οὔτε ἐς τὰ στρατόπεδα οὔτε ἐς τὰς ἐκκλησίας ἐτόλμησέ ποτε ἐσελθεῖν). The first assertion, and in particular the use of the verb αὐταρχεῖν, could recall passage 79 (78). 23. 3, where the historian describes Domna's reaction to the news of Caracalla's death:

Τοῦ θανάτου ἐπιθυμίαν κατέθετο, καὶ μηδὲν αὐτῷ ἀντιγράψασα ἔπρα-
τέν τι καὶ ἐς τοὺς συνόντας οἱ στρατιώτας (...) ὅπως αὐταρχήσῃ τῇ τε
Σεμιράμιδι καὶ τῇ Νιτώκριδι, ἅτε καὶ ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν τρόπον τινὰ χωρίων
αὐταῖς οὔσα, παρισουμένη.

She put aside her desire for death, and without writing him [i.e. Macri-
nus] any reply, began intriguing with the soldiers she had about her (...)
for she hoped to become sole ruler and make herself the equal of Semi-
ramis and Nitocris, inasmuch as she came in a sense from the same parts
as they.

Nevertheless, the context appears to be different from the conflicting situation that existed between Livia and Tiberius. Domna's desire to rule alone arises only after the death of her son. The reason, according to Dio, should be found in her aversion to the idea of returning to private life and renouncing to the power she had until then enjoyed.⁴⁰ Differently from the case of Livia and Tiberius, Dio's narration of the reign of Caracalla does not show a fight for power between Domna and Caracalla. The above-mentioned passage is the only occasion of conflict where the emperor refuses to follow the advice of his mother. However, a situation of discord between them does not seem to be confirmed by other facts that have been previously discussed, such as Domna's appointment to the administration of the correspondence and the inclusion of her name in letters to the senate along with those of the emperor and the legions. Also, there is no proof that Caracalla tried to stop the public receptions of Domna, as Tiberius did with that of Livia. While no sources record Livia as visiting either the senate or the camps, there is also no direct evidence that attests to the presence of Domna in one of these places, either in Dio or in other authors. Nonetheless, in 196 Domna was awarded the title *mater castrorum*⁴¹ and she always followed both her husband and her son during their campaigns.⁴² In spite of this, while the Bithynian senator was working

⁴⁰ 79 (78). 23. 1.

⁴¹ On the date of this event, which should be placed in 196 rather than in 195, cf. HEIL, M.: Clodius Albinus und der Bürgerkrieg von 197. In *Staatlichkeit und politisches Handeln in der römischen Kaiserzeit*. Ed. H.-U. WIEMER. Berlin, New York 2006, 55–85. On the title *mater castrorum* in general cf. LANGFORD (n. 21) 23–48; LEVICK (n. 22) 42–43; KETTENHOFEN, E.: *Die syrischen Augustae in der historischen Überlieferung: ein Beitrag zum Problem der Orientalisierung*. Bonn 1979, 81–83.

⁴² On the topic cf. LEVICK (n. 22) 35–56.

on his history, the presence of imperial women in the senate, in the camps, or at least in places where military operations were taking place, was not an unusual event. Dio reports that during the fight between the troops that supported Elagabalus and those loyal to Macrinus, both Julia Maesa and Julia Soaemias contributed to the battle by running after fleeing soldiers and persuading them to turn back.⁴³ When the last attempt of Elagabalus to eliminate his cousin Alexander was discovered, in order to placate the anger of the praetorians, the emperor came to the camp together with his mother Soaemias, Alexander, and Julia Mamaea. Whereas Elagabalus realized that he was closely guarded and about to be executed, Soaemias and Mamaea were quarreling and trying to attract the soldiers to support their respective causes.⁴⁴ As for the senate, the above passage describing both Maesa and Soaemias as sitting on either side of Elagabalus while before the senate he was making the adoption of his cousin official is particularly worth mentioning.⁴⁵ In conclusion, Dio's assertion that Livia never dared to enter neither military camps nor the senate or other public assemblies stresses a significant difference with the Severan age. Therefore, the information concerning Livia's attempts to take precedence over Tiberius in public affairs should come by the sources that Dio had access to.

d) *Question of the motherhood* (57. 12. 4)

According to Dio, many senators suggested the bestowal of several titles on Livia. Some of them proposed to call her 'Mother of the Country' (μήτηρ τῆς πατρίδος), while others preferred 'Parent' (γονεύς). A proposal to include maternal filiation in Tiberius' nomenclature was also put forward. All this information is reported in a very similar way by Tacitus.⁴⁶ According to the historian, *multa patrum et in Augustam adulatio. Alii parentem, alii matrem patriae appellandam, plerique ut nomini Caesaris adscriberetur 'Iuliae filius' censebant* ('The adulation of the senators was great towards the *Augusta* as well. Some of them proposed to call her 'Parent', others 'Mother of the Country', and many wanted to add 'son of Julia' to the name of Caesar'). Suetonius relates both the proposal of the title *parens patriae* and that of the filiation.⁴⁷ Another passage by Dio reports that after Livia's death many senators were still calling her 'Mother of the Country', since she had saved the life of many of them, raised their children and paid for the dowries of their daughters.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the title *mater patriae* appears on a coin struck in Leptis Magna, thus demonstrating that this title enjoyed a certain diffusion among the provincials.⁴⁹ However, all three historians agree

⁴³ 79 (78). 38. 4.

⁴⁴ 80 (79). 20. 1.

⁴⁵ 80 (79). 17. 2.

⁴⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 1. 14. 1.

⁴⁷ Suet. *Tib.* 50. 2.

⁴⁸ 58. 2. 3.

⁴⁹ *RPC* I 849.

that the bestowal of these honors was immediately stopped by Tiberius. The title *mater patriae* was not resurrected until 211, when it was bestowed to Domna along with *mater Senatus*, *pia* and *felix*. Also, the titles *mater patriae* and *mater Senatus* regularly appear among the titles of Mamaea during the reign of Severus Alexander.⁵⁰ Even though the senate bestowed these titles, Dio, whose account never mentions this fact, does not seem to pay great attention to this initiative, and Domna is always called either Ἰουλία or Ἰουλία ἡ Αὐγούστα. Nevertheless, considering that none of these honors was ever granted to any other imperial woman before Domna, a connection between the honors proposed for Livia in the accounts of Dio, Tacitus and Suetonius, and those awarded to the mother of Caracalla does not appear impossible. As stated above, the meaning of the bestowal of these new titles on Domna was probably a recognition of her role of supervision over both Caracalla and Geta after the death of Severus. Differently from the case of Livia, there is neither proof that Domna ever intervened to save senators from death, nor that she paid for maintaining their sons and providing their daughters with dowries.⁵¹ In spite of this, the suggestion for the titles *mater patriae* and *mater Senatus* could be related to the popularity that the figure of Livia still enjoyed during the Severan age. Scholars have underlined that references to the Augustan period were of great importance in Severus' propaganda.⁵² The fact that in this context Domna played an important role has also been stressed. Her name, together with those of Severus, Caracalla and Geta, appears on an inscription that records the restoration of the ancient temple of *Fortuna Muliebris*, which had been previously restored by Livia.⁵³ Furthermore, Domna's presence at the most Augustean event, the *Ludi Saeculares*, where she led the procession of one-hundred and nine *matronae* and presided over the ritual banquet in honor of Juno and Diana,⁵⁴ has been interpreted as a role that could recall the figure of Livia, though the name of the latter is not mentioned by the Augustean *Acta*. Starting from 195, the legend IVLIA AVGVSTA, a clear reference to the name of Livia after the adoption by Augustus in 14 AD, replaces IVLIA DOMNA AVGVSTA on the coins struck by imperial mints.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ KETTENHOFEN (n. 41) 156–160.

⁵¹ The benefactions of Livia are confirmed by one of the most relevant epigraphic documents from the reign of Tiberius, the *senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (20 AD). It recognizes Livia's *multis magnisque erga cuiusque ordinis homines beneficis*, cf. ECK, W. – CABALLOS, A. – FERNANDEZ, F.: *Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre*. München 1996, 226. See also GALIMBERTI (n. 2) 129–130.

⁵² COOLEY, A.: Septimius Severus: the Augustan Emperor. In *Severan Culture*. Ed. S. SWAIN – S. HARRISON – J. ELSNER. Cambridge 2007, 385–397; DESNIER, J.-L.: *Omina et realia*. Naissance de l'Urbs sacra sévérienne (193–204 ap. J.C.). *MEFRA* 105.2 (1993) 547–620.

⁵³ *CIL* VI 883. Cf. GORRIE, C.: Julia Domna's Building Patronage, Imperial Family Roles and the Severan Revival of Moral Legislation. *Historia* 53.1 (2004) 61–72, here 68–71.

⁵⁴ PIGHI, G. B.: *De ludis saecularibus populi Romani Quiritium. Editio altera addendis et corrigendis aucta*. Amsterdam 1965, IV^a 9–10, V^a 52 and V^a 83–84.

⁵⁵ *Sellisternia* held for one-hundred and ten matrons are mentioned, but the name of Livia does not appear, cf. SCHNEGG-KÖHLER, B.: *Die augusteischen Säkularspiele*. München 2002, lines 101–104. The sacrifice to Juno is performed by Agrippa (lines 119–120). FILIPPINI, E.: Il ruolo di Giulia Domna nell'ideologia imperiale. La documentazione numismatica. *Società Donne & Storia* 4 (2008) 1–69, here 8; LUSNIA, S. S.: Julia Domna's Coinage and Severan Dynastic Propaganda. *Latomus* 54.1 (1995) 119–140, here 120–121.

In addition, the representation illustrated by the famous altar of the *magistri vici sandaliari* from Rome is particularly noteworthy.⁵⁶ Augustus is portrayed as *pontifex maximus* holding the *lituus* in his right hand, while the female figure, who has been variously identified with either Livia or a deity,⁵⁷ is represented with the *patera* and the small incense box, the *acerra*. The interpretation of this scene is still uncertain, and there is no real evidence that it could refer to an episode that really happened. Nevertheless, a very similar pattern can be detected on the panels of the arch of Severus in Leptis Magna.⁵⁸ On the north-east frieze, while the emperor is holding the *lituus* (unfortunately damaged, but recognizable in the hand of the emperor on the south-west frieze), Julia Domna is represented in an identical pose holding the *acerra*. In her book on the iconography of the Syrian *Augusta*, Francesca Ghedini has observed that the use of the *lituus* can be interpreted as a direct reference to the Augustan age.⁵⁹ In fact, its use during ceremonies held by emperors seems to have disappeared up until the Severan period, when it is represented again not only on the arch of Leptis Magna, but also on the frame of the famous panel of the *Arcus argentariorum* with Severus and Domna in the act of sacrificing.⁶⁰ Finally, Dio relates that shortly after the death of Augustus, Livia organized a private festival in honor of her husband, and he also observes that this ceremony was still perpetuated in his time.⁶¹ All these clues seem to indicate that the correspondence between Augustus/Severus and Livia/Domna was well known to contemporaries of the Syrian *Augusta*. With regard to the proposal to include *Iuliae filius* in the nomenclature of Tiberius made by the senate, there is no

⁵⁶ POLLINI, J.: *From Republic to Empire: Rhetoric, Religion, and Power in the Visual Culture of Ancient Rome*. Norman (Okla.) 2012, 137–138 (fig. III 7); BERGMANN, B.: *Der Kranz des Kaisers: Genese und Bedeutung einer römischen Insignie*. Berlin – New York 2010, 298–299 (cat. no. 21); LOTT, J. B.: *The Neighborhoods of Augustan Rome*. Cambridge, New York 2004, 125–126, 144–146, 192–193 (fig. 14); GALINSKY, G. K.: *Augustan Culture: an Interpretive Introduction*. Princeton (N.J.) 1996, 304, 306 (fig. 142a); POLLINI, J.: *The portraiture of Gaius and Lucius Caesar*. New York 1987, 30–37; GHEDINI, F.: *Giulia Domna tra Oriente e Occidente. Le fonti archeologiche*. Roma 1984, 32–33 with further bibliography.

⁵⁷ An identification with Livia is supported by POLLINI: The portraiture (n. 56) 31; HERMANN, W.: *Römische Götteraltäre*. Kallmünz 1961, 86; MANSUELLI, G. A.: *Galleria degli Uffizi. Le sculture I*. Roma 1958, 203–205; POLACCO, L.: *Il volto di Tiberio. Saggio di critica iconografica*. Roma 1955, 74–77; RYBERG, I. S.: *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art*. Rome 1955, 60. According to GROSS, W. H.: *Iulia Augusta. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung einer Livia-Ikonographie*. Göttingen 1962, 76–78, the figure would represent the *Iuno* of Livia (this proposal is accepted by GHEDINI [n. 56]). ZANKER, P.: Über die Werkstätten augusteischer Larenaltäre und damit zusammenhängenden Probleme der Interpretation. *BCAR* 82 (1970–1971) 147–155, here 147–150, and ZANKER, P.: Der Larenaltar im Belvedere des Vatikans. *MDAI(R)* 76 (1969) 205–218, here 209–210 suggests an identification with *Venus Genetrix*.

⁵⁸ ROWAN, C.: *Under Divine Auspices. Divine Ideology and Visualisation of Power in the Severan Period*. Cambridge 2012, 84–99 (figs. 25–27, 29–31); NEWBY, Z.: Art at the Crossroads? Themes and Styles in Severan Art. In *Severan Culture* (n. 51) 201–249, here 206–211 (figs. 12.4, 12.5); WILSON, A.: Urban Development in the Severan Empire. In *Severan Culture* (n. 51) 290–326, here 295–297 (fig. 14.2); WARWICK, B.: *Rome in the East: the Transformation of an Empire*. London, New York 2000, 423–424 (figs. 159–160); GHEDINI (n. 56) 57–110 (figs. 3–11) with further bibliography.

⁵⁹ GHEDINI (n. 56) 60–61.

⁶⁰ Interpretation of the scene: ELSNER, J.: Sacrifice and Narrative on the Arch of the *Argentarii* at Rome. *JRA* 18.1 (2005) 83–98; GHEDINI (n. 56) 27–53. NEWBY (n. 58) 218–222 (figs. 12.11–14).

⁶¹ 56. 46. 5.

evidence for either Caracalla or Geta awarding a similar privilege to Domna after the death of Severus. Despite this, some inscriptions from the African provinces – which are characterized by a singular production of texts honoring members of the Severan household⁶² – provide intriguing examples of inclusion of the imperial Syrian women's names in inscriptions dedicated to their sons and nephews. The more consistent group is represented by a series of milestones set up in 215 in the province of Mauretania Caesarensis by different communities, but in particular by the important city of *Sitiffs*.⁶³ The same text, however, can be found on milestones set up by the cities of *Igilgili*⁶⁴ and by the *res publica Thamallulensium Antoninianorum*.⁶⁵ At the beginning of each inscription the name of Caracalla is reproted including the name of Domna together with that of Severus in the filiation:

Imperatori Caesari M. Aurelio Severo Antonino Pio Felici Augusto, divi Septimi Severi Pii, Arabici, Adiabenici, Parthici maximi, Britannici maximi, Augusti et Iuliae Domnae Augustae, matris castrorum et senatus et patriae filio (...)

To the emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Pius Felix Augustus, son of the divine Septimius Severus Pius Augustus, Arabicus the great, Adiabenicus the great, Parthicus the great, Britannicus the great, and of Julia Domna Augusta, mother of the camps, the senate and the fatherland (...)

The fact that all the milestones report the same text with the only difference being the city name, suggests that the draft of the text was written following either an agreement between the cities or the indications provided by a higher authority, such as the administration of the province. Approximately at the same time, the same formula is also attested by another milestone that records the restoration of a road by the city of *Cuicul* in Numidia.⁶⁶ Together with Severus, Domna is recorded as the 'second parent' on two statue bases set up when the African emperor was still alive. One comes from the city of *Auzia* (Mauretania Caesarensis) and was dedicated to Geta in 204.⁶⁷ The other was dedicated to Caracalla in *Uchi Maius* (Africa Proconsularis) in 202.⁶⁸ Finally, another milestone from *Cuicul*,⁶⁹ with the text erased for the most part but still fortunately legible, reports the name of Severus Alexander followed by the filiation with both the name of Mamaea and that of his grandmother Maesa:

⁶² For an overview cf. MASTINO, A.: I Severi nel Nord-Africa. In *XI Congresso Internazionale di Epigrafia Greca e Latina: Roma, 18–24 settembre 1997*. Roma 1999, 359–417.

⁶³ *CIL* VIII 10340 = 22401, 10359 = 22403; *BCTH* 1928/29, 165.

⁶⁴ *AE* 1987, 1088.

⁶⁵ *BCTH* 1907, CXCI.

⁶⁶ *AE* 1911, 101. The indication of Caracalla's third *tribunicia potestas*, reported in the *AE* edition (TRIB POT III), cannot be accepted, since it would date the text back to 200. It is probably either a wrong reading for *trib. pot. XVIII* (215) or an error by the stonecutter.

⁶⁷ *CIL* VIII 9035.

⁶⁸ *AE* 2000, 1733.

⁶⁹ *AE* 1912, 155.

gave another banquet for the senators on the Capitol, and Livia did the same with the women somewhere else.⁷¹ Nevertheless, as reported by 57. 12. 5, when she tried to feast senators, knights and their matrons together, Tiberius immediately stopped the initiative, allowing her to dine with the women only. Thus, entertaining the ruling class with banquets was considered a sign of great power and prestige, and it is probably not coincidental that Dio inserted the last episode in the paragraph about Livia's influence and her conflict with Tiberius.⁷² As stated above, the name of Domna appears more than one time on the *acta* of the Secular Games, where she is reported to have participated in several banquets together with the one hundred-nine matrons who were present at the celebrations.⁷³ However, writing about his time, the Bithynian historian does not record either this or other similar events. An intriguing episode is represented, in my view, by Dio's mention of the banquet organized in 202 for the wedding of Caracalla and Plautilla:

Εἰσιτάθημεν δὲ ἐν ταύτῳ ἅμα, τὰ μὲν βασιλικῶς τὰ δὲ βαρβαρικῶς, ἐφθά τε πάντα ὅσα νομίζεται, καὶ ὠμὰ ζῶντά τε ἄλλα λαβόντες.⁷⁴

And there [i.e. the imperial palace] we were all entertained together at a banquet, partly in royal and partly in barbaric style, receiving not only all the customary cooked viands but also uncooked meat and sundry animals still alive.

The use of the adverb βαρβαρικῶς ('in barbaric style') does not seem to point at customs introduced by either Severus or Plautianus, whose habits are never described as 'barbarian' by Dio. The reference is almost certainly to Domna's cultural background. The adjective βαρβαρικός, in fact, has a derogatory connotation with regard to Syrian customs imported at court by both Elagabalus and members of his Syrian family. While criticizing the bizarre rituals performed by the emperor, Dio recounts 'barbaric chants' (βαρβαρικὰς ᾠδὰς) sung by Elagabalus, Soaemias, and Maesa in their prayers to Helagabal.⁷⁵ Furthermore, he states that Elagabalus was often seen in public while wearing 'barbaric dress which the Syrian priests use' (τὴν ἐσθῆτα τὴν βαρβαρικὴν, ἣ οἱ τῶν Σύρων ἱερεῖς χρῶνται).⁷⁶ Thus, the 'barbaric' fashion that characterized the wedding banquet of Caracalla should be attributed to the Syrian *Augusta*, who presumably took part in the reception to entertain the senators which she was involved in organizing. Despite the different circumstances – banquets to celebrate the victories of Tiberius and a monument in memory of Augustus in the case of Livia, a wedding banquet in the case of Domna – all these events had a clear political significance.

⁷¹ 55. 8. 2.

⁷² STEIN-HÖLKESKAMP, E.: Damen beim Dinner: zu Tisch mit Lesbia und Livia. *Hermes* 133.2 (2005) 200 has observed that at imperial banquets the role of host, which Roman customs traditionally reserved to the *pater familias*, could be played by the emperor only.

⁷³ Cf. *supra* n. 51.

⁷⁴ 77 (76). 1. 2.

⁷⁵ 80 (79). 11. 3.

⁷⁶ 80 (79). 11. 2.

The purpose of Livia was to stress the influential position she still enjoyed after her husband's death by convening both senators and knights to celebrate the memory of Augustus. Yet Tiberius, who was intolerant to the influence that his mother was trying to exercise over him, moderated this initiative by allowing Livia to entertain only the women according to the customary etiquette. As for Domna, the episode of the wedding should be contextualized in the struggle between her and the father of Plautilla, the powerful prefect of the guard Fulvius Plautianus, whose influence was at that time reaching its apex.⁷⁷ According to Dio, his hatred towards Domna was so deep that he was frequently trying to put her in a bad light when meeting with Severus, and searching for evidence against her by conducting investigations among the women of the nobility.⁷⁸ In the lines before the information about the banquet, Dio relates that Plautianus spent a huge amount of money for his daughter's dowry. The gifts were even paraded through the Forum before him and his colleagues, who were later received at the palace for the banquet.⁷⁹ The presence of Domna as organizer of a reception according to her homeland's customs could therefore have had a strong symbolic significance, showing that the *Augusta* was still maintaining her influence at court. Curiously enough, Dio does not seem to pay great attention to these episodes, especially with regard to the value that they could have assumed in the context of the struggles between opposite factions at the imperial court. After having described the banquet in a cursory way, he dedicates the following narration to the description of the variety of the beasts employed in the games organized to celebrate the *decennalia* of Severus. The whole narrative, therefore, seems to consist of a simple record of events that occurred before Dio's eyes. The information about Livia's banquet, on the other hand, is more detailed. It provides interesting particulars, such as the intention to summon both knights and senators, the opposition of Tiberius, the vote in the senate and the final separation between men and women. Such precision could come from the sources that Dio consulted and transcribed in his account.

CONCLUSIONS

Although Dio occasionally uses some characters to express ideas about the necessity of clemency that are particularly important to him, he does not seem to expand Livia's influence as a result of the impression that Julia Domna and other Syrian imperial women left on him. Livia appears very determined in imposing her influence because this was the picture that Dio found in his sources. Dio himself states this at the end of the paragraph where he collects the information about the conflicts between Livia and Tiberius (57. 12. 6): ταῦτα μὲν περὶ τῆς Λιουίας παραδέδοται ('such are the reports

⁷⁷ On the topic cf. LEVICK (n. 22) 74–86; DAGUET-GAGEY, A.: C. Fulvius Plautianus, «hostis publicus»: Rome, 205–208 après J.-C. In *La «crise» de l'Empire romain de Marc Aurèle à Constantin: mutations, continuités, ruptures*. Ed. M.-H. QUET. Paris 2006, 65–94.

⁷⁸ 76 (75). 15. 6.

⁷⁹ 77 (76). 1. 2.

handed down about Livia').⁸⁰ The analogies between Livia and Domna are certainly notable. Nevertheless, the Syrian *Augusta* appears to have gone much further in imposing her influence. While Livia could receive senators and other people in her house Domna could do the same in public and in the same way as Caracalla did. While the name of Livia appeared in the letters of Tiberius only for a certain period, not only the name of the Syrian *Augusta* was regularly included in imperial letters, but she could even manage the imperial correspondence itself. While the concession of the honorific titles proposed by the senate after the death of Augustus was prevented by Tiberius, similar honors were officially adopted by Domna soon after the death of Severus.

It is highly probable that the figure of Livia was a source of inspiration for Domna. Besides the similarities in the approaches that they adopted in their relationships with senators and other distinguished personalities, this seems to be confirmed by the great efforts to imitate the Augustan regime by the Severan establishment. Also, the fact that honors such as *mater patriae* were not bestowed to any other imperial woman during the almost two centuries that separate the age of Livia from that of Domna must certainly be taken into consideration. In spite of this, in his depiction of these two women, Dio does not seem to pay great attention to the historical significance of the facts that he narrates. He usually limits himself to recording a brief series of events. In the case of the contrasts between Livia and Tiberius, in a dedicated section he puts together all the most notable information that he found in his sources. Thus, by extracting each event from its context, he mixes occurrences concerning different matters, such as the receptions, the letters, and the honors bestowed by the senate and the banquets. With regard to Domna, Dio mentions her only episodically, and mostly with polemic intent. He criticizes Caracalla for not paying attention to the good advice of his mother, and then for allowing her to hold receptions and to supervise imperial correspondence. Dio uses her suicide after the assassination of her son to stigmatize her excessive desire of power, thus implying that the end of Caracalla's reign is the fall of both a degenerate emperor and a woman who had been excessively ambitious.

In the sections on both Livia and Domna, it is therefore difficult to find any effort by Dio to investigate the relationship between these women and the male members of their households, and, in consequence, the real nature of their political influence. When recounting these events, Dio can be better defined as a compiler rather than an historian.⁸¹ Nonetheless, as stated in the introduction, he still provides irreplaceable pieces of evidence to remedy the absence of information in the works of other historians. This is true for Livia, whose study can in any case rely on other detailed accounts provided by both Tacitus and Suetonius, but especially for Domna, whose figure finds little space in the more succinct narrations of both Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*. Herodian, who lived approximately at the same time as Dio, in

⁸⁰ In general, Dio's reliance on annalistic sources for the composition of books 51–56 has been investigated by SWAN, P. M.: How Cassius Dio Composed his Augustan Books: Four Studies. *ANRW* II.34.3 (1997) 2524–2557.

⁸¹ Similar conclusions, although of a more general dimension and regarding only the history of Dio's own times, in MILLAR (n. 30) 171–173.

a more concise way, mentions her only on a few occasions after the death of Severus.⁸² The *Historia Augusta* reports some other details, but also false stories such as her supposed incest with Caracalla.⁸³ The history of Dio, therefore, remains a fundamental source for the study of these imperial women.

Riccardo Bertolazzi
 Department of Classics and Religion
 The University of Calgary
 2500 University Dr. NW
 T2N 1N4 Calgary (Alberta)
 Canada
 rbertola@ucalgary.ca

⁸² 3. 15. 6 (presence at *Eburacum*); 4. 3. 4–9 (attempt to reconcile Caracalla); 4. 4. 3 (presence at Geta's assassination); 4. 13. 8 (suicide).

⁸³ Spart. *Carac.* 6. 6. For an overview of the quotations of Domna by the *Historia Augusta* cf. KETTENHOFEN (n. 41) 57–62. On the anecdote of Caracalla's incest cf. LETTA, C.: Caracalla e Iulia Domna: tradizioni storiografiche come echi di propaganda politica. *Abruzzo* 23–28 (1985–1990) 521–529, here 525–529.